



Handbook on Monitoring & Evaluation

Prepared for

COMMUNITY MEDICINE ASSOCIATION

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Iraqi Health System Strengthening Project

Iraq Health Empowerment Leadership Program



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1. Preface

Monitoring and evaluation (M&E) are integral part of any successful health project. Evaluation not only checks whether the project reached its proposed objectives, but it checks through the process of monitoring all the program activities, and when there is a deviation from what is planned, an appropriate method will be taken to solve the constraints and continuing the plan toward its proposed objectives. In Iraq, M&E is supervised by the departments of planning of the health directorates, their role is mainly data collection and transfer to the ministry of health, but no rigorous M&E is carried out for health projects on governmental level, even at ministerial level due to lack of capacity, distorted incentives, and lack of consensus.

This publication, *"The Handbook on Monitoring and Evaluation"* addresses the basic requirements to understand monitoring and evaluation. It is intended to support M&E personnel in aligning their monitoring and evaluation systems with the standard methodology specifically in tracking and measuring the performance of health projects interventions and strategies and their contributions to outcomes. It aims to provide simple, flexible and forward-looking tools that will service as a base for national capacity building in the field of monitoring and evaluation of health projects and programs.

2. Key Definitions

Cost-effectiveness

The relation between the costs (inputs) and results produced by a project. A project is more cost-effective when it achieves its results at the lowest possible cost compared with alternative projects with the same intended results.

Evaluation:

A time-bound exercise that attempts to assess systematically and objectively the relevance, performance and success of ongoing and completed programs and projects. Evaluation can also address outcomes or other development issues. Evaluation is undertaken selectively to answer specific questions to guide decision-makers and/or program managers, and to provide information on whether underlying theories and assumptions used in program development were valid, what worked and what did not work and why. Evaluation commonly aims to determine relevance, efficiency, effectiveness, impact and sustainability. Evaluation is a vehicle for extracting cross-cutting lessons from operating unit experiences and determining the need for modifications to the strategic results framework. Evaluation should provide information that is credible and useful, enabling the incorporation of lessons learned into the decision-making process.

Effectiveness

The extent to which a development outcome is achieved through interventions. The extent to which a program or project achieves its planned results (goals, purposes and outputs) and contributes to outcomes.

Efficiency

The optimal transformation of inputs into outputs.

Impact

The overall and long-term effect of an intervention. Impact is the longer-term or ultimate result attributable to a development intervention—in contrast to output and outcome, which reflect more immediate results from the intervention.

The concept of impact is close to “development effectiveness”. Examples: higher standard of living, increased food security, increased earnings from exports, increased savings owing to a decrease in imports.

Impact evaluation

A type of evaluation that focuses on the broad, longer-term impact or results, whether intended or unintended, of a program or outcome. For example, an impact evaluation could show that a decrease in a community's overall infant mortality rate was the direct result of a program designed to provide high quality pre- and post-natal care and deliveries assisted by trained health care professionals.

Indicator

Signal that reveals progress (or lack thereof) towards objectives; means of measuring what actually happens against what has been planned in terms of quantity, quality and timeliness. An indicator is a quantitative or qualitative variable that provides a simple and reliable basis for assessing achievement, change or performance.

Mid-term evaluation

A type of evaluation carried out during project or program implementation. Its principal goal is to assess progress made, to draw initial conclusions for managing the program or project and to make recommendations for the remaining period. It addresses operational issues of relevance and performance and extracts initial lessons learned. Sometimes referred to as an "ongoing" evaluation.

Monitoring

A continuing function that aims primarily to provide managers and main stakeholders with regular feedback and early indications of progress or lack thereof in the achievement of intended results. Monitoring tracks the actual performance or situation against what was planned or expected according to pre-determined standards. Monitoring generally involves collecting and analyzing data on implementation processes, strategies and results, and recommending corrective measures.

Outcome

Actual or intended change in development conditions. It describes a change in development conditions between the completion of outputs and the achievement of impact. Examples: increased rice yield, increased income for the farmers.

Outcome evaluation

Evaluation that covers a set of related projects, programs and strategies intended to bring about a certain outcome. An outcome evaluation assesses "how" and "why" outcomes are or are not being achieved in a given country. It can also help to clarify the underlying factors that explain the achievement or lack thereof of outcomes; highlight unintended consequences (both positive and negative) of interventions; and recommend actions to improve performance in future programming cycles and generate lessons learned.

Outcome monitoring

A process of collecting and analyzing data to measure the performance of a program, project, partnership, policy reform process and/or “soft” assistance towards achievement of development outcomes at country level. A defined set of indicators is constructed to track regularly the key aspects of performance. Performance reflects effectiveness in converting inputs to outputs, outcomes and impacts.

Outputs

Tangible products (including services) of a program or project that are necessary to achieve the objectives of a program or project. Outputs relate to the completion (rather than the conduct) of activities and are the type of results over which managers have a high degree of influence. Example: agricultural extension services provided to rice farmers.

Performance assessment

External assessment or self-assessment by program units, comprising outcome, program, project or individual monitoring, reviews, end-of-year reporting, end-of-project reporting, institutional assessments and/or special studies.

Performance indicator

A particular characteristic or dimension used to measure intended changes defined by an organizational unit's results framework. Performance indicators are used to observe progress and to measure actual results compared to expected results. They serve to answer “how” or “whether” a unit is progressing towards its objectives, rather than “why” or “why not” such progress is being made. Performance indicators are usually expressed in quantifiable terms, and should be objective and measurable (e.g., numeric values, percentages, scores, and indices).

Performance measurement

The collection, interpretation of, and reporting on data for performance indicators which measure how well programs or projects deliver outputs and contribute to achievement of higher level aims (purposes and goals). Performance measures are most useful when used for comparisons over time or among units performing similar work. A system for assessing performance of development initiatives against stated goals. Also described as the process of objectively measuring how well an agency is meeting its stated goals or objectives.

Project evaluation

An evaluation of a project or a specific development intervention to attain designated objectives, in a determined time span, and following an established plan of action. The basis of evaluation should be built in to the project document.

Rating system

An instrument for forming and validating a judgment on the relevance, performance or success of a program or project through the use of a scale with numeric, alphabetic and/or descriptive codes.

Relevance

The degree to which the objectives of a program or project remain valid and pertinent as originally planned or as subsequently modified owing to changing circumstances within the immediate context and external environment of that program or project. For an outcome, the extent to which the outcome reflects key national priorities and receives support from key partners.

Reliability

Consistency and dependability of data collected through repeated use of a scientific instrument or data collection procedure under the same conditions. Absolute reliability of evaluation data is hard to obtain. However, checklists and training of evaluators can improve both data reliability and validity. Sound reliability implies exhaustive data collection and the appropriateness of the evaluative questions asked.

Results

A broad term used to refer to the effects of a program or project and/or activities. The terms “outputs”, “outcomes” and “ impact ” describe more precisely the different types of results at different levels of the log frame hierarchy.

Results-Based Management (RBM)

A management strategy or approach by which an organization ensures that its processes, products and services contribute to the achievement of clearly stated results. Results-based management provides a coherent framework for strategic planning and management by improving learning and accountability. It is also a broad management strategy aimed at achieving important changes in the way agencies operate, with improving performance and achieving results as the central orientation, by defining realistic expected results, monitoring progress towards the achievement of expected results, integrating lessons learned into management decisions and reporting on performance.

Stakeholders

People, groups or entities that have a role and interest in the objectives and implementation of a program or project. They include the community whose situation the program seeks to change; project field staff who implement activities; project and program managers who oversee implementation; donors and other decision-makers who decide the course of action related to the program; and supporters, critics and other persons who influence the program environment. In participatory evaluation, stakeholders assume an increased role in the evaluation process as question-makers, evaluation planners, data gatherers and problem solvers.

Sustainability

Durability of positive program or project results after the termination of the technical cooperation channeled through that program or project; static sustainability—the continuous flow of the same benefits, set in motion by the completed program or project, to the same target groups; dynamic sustainability—the use or adaptation of program or project results to a different context or changing environment by the original target groups and/or other groups. For an outcome, it reflects whether the positive change in development situation will endure.

Terminal evaluation

Evaluation conducted after the intervention has been in place for some time or towards the end of a project or program to measure outcomes, demonstrate the effectiveness and relevance of interventions and strategies, indicate early signs of impact, and recommend what interventions to promote or abandon.

Validity

The extent to which a measurement or test accurately measures what it is supposed to. Valid evaluations take into account all relevant factors, given the whole context of the evaluation, and weigh them appropriately in the process of formulating conclusions and recommendations.

3. Monitoring and Evaluation Framework

This part covers:

- 3.1. Purposes of monitoring and evaluation
- 3.2. Definitions of monitoring and evaluation

3.1. Purposes of Monitoring and Evaluation

Monitoring and evaluation help improve performance and achieve results. More precisely, the overall purpose of monitoring and evaluation is the measurement and assessment of performance in order to more effectively manage the outcomes and outputs known as development results. Performance is defined as progress towards and achievement of results. As part of the emphasis on results today, the need to demonstrate performance is placing new demands on monitoring and evaluation in health offices and program units.

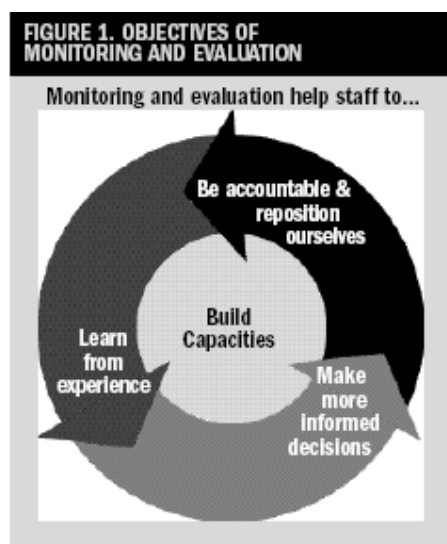
Traditionally, monitoring and evaluation focused on assessing inputs and implementation processes.

Managers are being asked to actively apply the information gained through monitoring and evaluation to improve strategies, programs and other activities.

The main objectives of today's results-oriented monitoring and evaluation are to:

- Enhance organizational and development learning.
- Ensure informed decision-making.
- Build country capacity in each of these areas, and in monitoring and evaluating functions in general.

These objectives are linked together in a continuous process, as shown in Figure 1.



Learning from the past contributes to more informed decision-making. Better decisions lead to greater accountability to stakeholders. Better decisions also improve performance, allowing for health projects activities to be repositioned continually. Partnering closely with key stakeholders throughout this process also promotes shared knowledge creation and learning, helps transfer skills, and develops the capacity of country health offices and projects for planning, monitoring and evaluation. These stakeholders also provide valuable feedback that can be used to improve performance and learning. In this way, good practices at the heart of monitoring and evaluation are continually reinforced, making a positive contribution to the overall effectiveness of development.

3.2. Definitions of Monitoring and Evaluation

Monitoring can be defined as a continuing function that aims primarily to provide the management and main stakeholders of an ongoing intervention with early indications of progress, or lack thereof, in the achievement of results. An ongoing intervention might be a project, program or other kind of support to an outcome.

Evaluation is a selective exercise that attempts to systematically and objectively assess progress towards and the achievement of an outcome. Evaluation is not a one-time event, but an exercise involving assessments of differing scope and depth carried out at several points in time in response to evolving needs for evaluative knowledge and learning during the effort to achieve an outcome. All evaluations—even project evaluations that assess relevance, performance and other criteria—need to be linked to outcomes as opposed to only implementation or immediate outputs.

Reporting is an integral part of monitoring and evaluation. Reporting is the systematic and timely provision of essential information at periodic intervals.

Monitoring and evaluation take place at two distinct but closely connected levels: One level focuses on the outputs, which are the specific products and services that emerge from processing inputs through program, project and other activities such as through soft assistance delivered outside of projects and programs. The other level focuses on the outcomes of the development efforts, which are the changes in development conditions that any project aims to achieve through its programs. Outcomes incorporate the production of outputs and the contributions of partners.

Figure 2 illustrates how outputs and outcomes inter-relate during the process of achieving results.



Two other terms frequently used in monitoring and evaluation are defined below:

Feedback is a process within the framework of monitoring and evaluation by which information and knowledge are disseminated and used to assess overall progress towards results or confirm the achievement of results. Feedback may consist of findings, conclusions, recommendations and lessons from experience. It can be used to improve performance and as a basis for decision-making and the promotion of learning in an organization.

A *lesson learned* is an instructive example based on experience that is applicable to a general situation rather than to a specific circumstance. It is learning from experience. The lessons learned from an activity through evaluation are considered evaluative knowledge, which stakeholders are more likely to internalize if they have been involved in the evaluation process. Lessons learned can reveal “good practices” that suggest how and why different strategies work in different situations—valuable information that needs to be documented.

4. How to Conduct Monitoring and Evaluation

4.1. Planning for Monitoring & evaluation:

This section describes how to develop a comprehensive, logical planning framework for monitoring and evaluation related to Country Programs, the strategic results framework, project-level and other activities. It provides guidance on how to develop a monitoring and evaluation plan, as well as criteria for selecting and planning evaluations. The objective of this section is to help users plan for monitoring and evaluation actions in a coherent manner, depending on the needs of the country and the intended results.

This chapter covers:

4.1.1. Key principles for planning

- Overall work planning
- Minimum requirements
- Planning at the Country Program level

4.1.2. The planning process

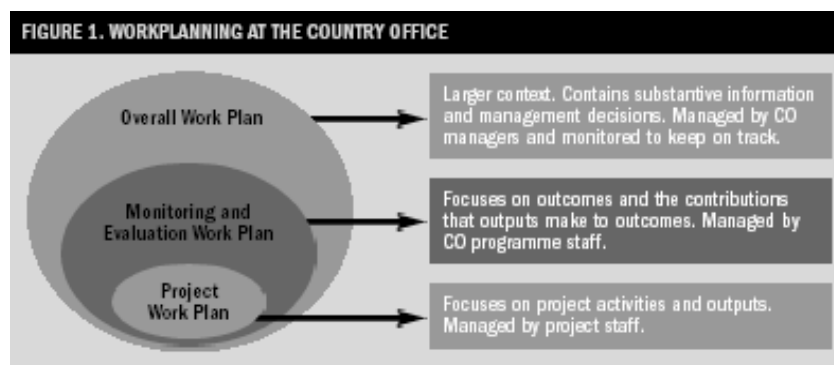
- Planning for monitoring
- Planning for evaluation
- Project work planning

4.1.1. Key Principles for Planning

- Overall work planning

A work plan is an annual or multi-year summary of tasks, timeframes and responsibilities. It is used as a monitoring tool to ensure the production of outputs and progress towards outcomes. Work plans describe the activities to be conducted as well as the expected outputs and outcomes. The overall process of work planning is a comprehensive tool that helps people translate information or ideas into operational terms on an annual basis. Monitoring and evaluation are integral parts of a health office's overall work plan, which encompasses many additional areas.

A health office, or country office (CO) work plan, as illustrated in Figure 1, contains three inter-related elements:



- The overall work plan, which contains substantive information and management actions and is overseen by health office management;
- The monitoring and evaluation work plan, which is focused on outputs and outcomes and overseen by program staff; and
- The project work plan, which is focused on activities and outputs and overseen by project staff.

At the health office level, work planning is reflecting the shift to results-based management by placing greater emphasis on the planning of monitoring and evaluation.

- Minimum requirements

It is required that the country wide M&E teams may integrate their results-oriented monitoring and evaluation planning into existing systems and structures in any number of ways. Nevertheless, as a minimum for planning, offices should:

1. Plan monitoring and evaluation simultaneously: Evaluation is an important monitoring tool and monitoring is an important input to evaluation. Because they are so interrelated, it is recommended that countrywide M&E centers plan monitoring and evaluation processes together at the same time.
2. Capture results (outcome and outputs): Meaningful information about outcomes and outputs needs to be captured, regardless of the unit of analysis used by a monitoring and evaluation plan (e.g. outcomes, outputs, projects, activities, themes, areas).
3. Develop an evaluation plan: An evaluation plan covers outcomes for the Country Program period. All operating units and offices prepare a mandatory evaluation plan within the first quarter of each Country Program cycle. This is a key element in performance assessment.
4. Base planning on a strategic choice: Planning is not primarily about scheduling (the timing and selection of tools); it is about determining the best approach depending on the needs and the nature of what is being monitored or evaluated.

- Planning at the country program level

Planning of monitoring and evaluation begins as early as the formulation stage of the Country Program. It is kept up-to-date continuously, which may be annually or periodically depending on local needs and as plans become more concrete and programs evolve. Such planning leads to strategic and selective decisions about what to evaluate, when and why. In other words, it takes into account how the evaluation will be used to improve programming and policy.

This will include:

- Deciding on the strategies for monitoring and evaluation and describe these arrangements in the country program outline (CPO). Define a general approach for how monitoring and evaluation will be carried out. Indicate the outcomes to be evaluated (or the process that will be used to make this decision). Also indicate how outcomes, programs and projects will be monitored in general terms. Note: This step often yields an opportunity to reach agreement on monitoring and evaluation with the government through the Country Program formulation process.
- Plan outcome evaluations. Actually select specific outcomes (results or development changes) to evaluate and the timing of these evaluations.

- Plan outcome monitoring and set up systems for this. The assessment of progress towards outcomes is based on the continuous collection of data and information. This may involve using existing mechanisms or establishing consultation groups on outcomes, determining how indicator data will be collected, discussing the focus of such monitoring and so on.
- Once the CPO is approved and implementation of the Country Program starts, plan detailed program project monitoring for Year 1. This should go beyond the planned monitoring for the related outcome. In other words, program/project monitoring should address implementation issues and production of outputs, as well as progress towards outcomes, whereas the outcome monitoring plan would focus at a higher level.

4.1.2. The Planning Process

- Planning for monitoring

A plan for monitoring may focus on projects and programs as well as the resulting development changes (outcomes). Projects, programs and new activities are developed or initiated during every programming cycle. At this time, plans for their monitoring and evaluation are drawn up.

A few examples of different kinds of monitoring arrangements are provided below:

- If the outcome being monitored is the enhancement of livelihoods at the village level, a more participatory approach may be required;
- If the outcome involves a high degree of policy advice, the monitoring plan should include a means of following the policy formulation process in the country;
- If the outcome involves a high degree of advocacy, monitoring might need to capture changes in perceptions (as revealed through client surveys or focus groups) rather than physical changes (as revealed through field visits to project sites);
- If the outcome is at the regional or global level, monitoring may require more frequent reporting because the countries involved are spread out geographically.

When planning monitoring to assess progress towards outcomes (outcome monitoring),

Country offices are encouraged to take the following steps:

1. Assess needs: This is done by assessing the nature of the outcome and/or the programs and projects that are expected to contribute to outcome. What information is needed to assess that outcome? What elements are most important to keep track of? What would indicate progress or success?
2. Assess current monitoring: To assess current monitoring (or proposed monitoring for new projects), look at the monitoring tools being used in all of the projects and programs intended to contribute to a given outcome. Are these tools providing the necessary information? Do they involve the key partners? Is monitoring focusing on key issues for efficiency? Are there possibilities for greater efficiency and coordination? This will help to identify gaps in the analysis as compared with the needs for this information.
3. Review monitoring scope or tools: Is there a need for additional or specific monitoring scope or tools to suit the program or project? For example, large or complex programs may require more details about implementation, downstream projects may require additional participation by beneficiaries, and innovative pilot

projects may generate specific lessons learned that should be captured through monitoring.

4. Adapt and/or design monitoring mechanisms: The mechanisms used should provide sufficient analysis on outcomes and close the gap, if any, between the available and the required information. For example, if steering mechanisms are being used to monitor, be sure to include partners working in the same outcome area. Or, if an outcome involves a large number of partners, add tools such as stakeholder meetings.

No format is required for a monitoring plan. In practical terms, such planning can be reflected in CO work plans, in project work plans, in the individual work plans of Program Managers and in plans for coordination mechanisms. Nevertheless, for effective outcome monitoring, many COs will want to produce one document that describes the totality of monitoring efforts.

- Planning for evaluation

Evaluation is important for learning, validation of results and decision-making. Evaluation planning is linked to the projects' programming cycle. Within the first quarter of each project, M&E team prepare and submit the evaluation plan to the Evaluation Office. Subsequently, the plan is kept up to date continuously, annually or periodically depending on local needs, becoming in essence a “rolling” plan. For example, if a health office plans its first outcome evaluation three years into the Country Program, the health office may not need to revisit the evaluation plan for two years—that is, until the year prior to the evaluation. Any revision of the plan over the course of the cycle should be presented first by the CO to the Evaluation Office. Sometimes revision is required when circumstances change, such as a loss or gain in financial resources or when there is change in the national context.

- Project work planning

The project work plan is a tool used to set targets for the delivery of outputs and to develop a strategy for maximizing the contribution of the project and associated activities to the attainment of the goals of the strategic results framework (SRF). The work planning process helps build consensus between project management and other stakeholders on the best strategy for generating results.

When taking a results-based approach to work planning, it is important to review the work plan regularly. The focus should be on the broad goals of the SRF rather than a more limited focus on the project's objectives. This work plan serves as a mechanism to link inputs, budget, activities, outputs and outcomes. As lessons are learned, a more flexible approach to implementing the project may be needed to accommodate constant adjustments.

The Program Manager uses project work plans as the basis for monitoring the progress of project implementation. Project work plans enable Program Managers and other stakeholders to agree on results and to ensure that these results conform and contribute to the results and targets in the SRF. They also can be used as the basis for discussion about activities to produce outputs, inputs and budget lines. Critical milestones for activities and outputs in the work plan can serve as early warning indications that progress is off-target. The Project Manager should include the project's key monitoring and evaluation actions in the work plan, noting in particular

how the production of outputs will be monitored. The plan may also include how to supervise contractors, how to collect data and information, and specific monitoring events such as stakeholder meetings.

4.2. The Monitoring Process

Monitoring is arguably the most important responsibility of any Program Manager. She or he monitors the progress of project activities towards the intended outcomes, and selects different monitoring approaches to do so. This section provides guidance on the successful monitoring of results, which includes a mix of reporting and analysis, verification of progress towards results and participation.

Monitoring is based on adequate planning, and also serves as the basis for evaluation.

This section covers:

4.2.1. Key principles for monitoring

- Conducting good monitoring
- Scope of monitoring
- Selecting the right monitoring tools

4.2.2. The building blocks: Monitoring tools and mechanisms

- Field visits
- Annual project report (APR)
- Outcome groups
- Annual review (AR)

4.2.1. Key Principles for Monitoring

Good monitoring means that monitoring is continuous, involves partners, and is focused on progress towards outcomes. Such monitoring provides the basis for the results-oriented annual report (ROAR) and for evaluations. Good monitoring requires that a health office find the right mix of tools and is able to balance the analysis of reports, reviews and validation, and participation. Good monitoring is not demonstrated by merely producing reports in a prescribed format at set intervals.

- Conducting good monitoring

The credibility of findings and assessments depends to a large extent on the manner in which monitoring and evaluation is conducted. Good principles (also called “minimum standards”) for monitoring are as follows:

- Good monitoring focuses on results and follow-up. It looks for “what is going well” and “what is not progressing” in terms of progress towards intended results. It then records this in reports, makes recommendations and follows-up with decisions and action.
- Good monitoring depends to a large measure on good design. If a project is poorly designed or based on faulty assumptions, even the best monitoring is unlikely to ensure its success. Particularly important is the design of a realistic results chain of outcome, outputs and activities. Offices should avoid using monitoring for correcting recurring problems that need permanent solutions.

- Good monitoring requires regular visits by CO staff who focus on results and follow-up to verify and validate progress. In addition, the Program Manager must organize visits and/or bilateral meetings dedicated to assessing progress, looking at the big picture and analyzing problem areas. The Program Manager ensures continuous documentation of the achievements and challenges as they occur and does not wait until the last moment to try to remember what happened.
- Regular analysis of reports such as the annual project report (APR) is another minimum standard for good monitoring. Such reports, prepared by Project management serve as basis for analysis by program managers.
- Monitoring also benefits from the use of participatory monitoring mechanisms to ensure commitment, ownership, follow-up and feedback on performance. This is indispensable for outcome monitoring where progress cannot be assessed without some knowledge of what partners are doing. Participatory mechanisms include outcome groups, stakeholder meetings, steering committees and focus group interviews.
- Good monitoring finds ways to objectively assess progress and performance based on clear criteria and indicators. To better assess progress towards outcomes, country offices must make an effort to improve their performance measurement system by developing indicators and baselines.
- Finally, as part of good monitoring, the health office is seen to actively generate lessons learned, ensure learning through all monitoring tools, adapt strategies accordingly and avoid repeating mistakes from the past. The use of electronic media for memory and sharing lessons is also considered a minimum standard.

- Scope of monitoring

Monitoring aims to identify progress towards results. Using the information gained through monitoring, the Program Manager must analyze and take action on the program and project activities that are contributing to the intended results— results that are within the strategic areas of support in the strategic results framework (SRF) for the country. Program Managers also monitor and document the contributions of soft interventions and strategic partnerships. These tasks all form part of outcome monitoring.

All monitoring and evaluation efforts should address, as a minimum:

- Progress towards outcomes: This entails periodically analyzing the extent to which intended outcomes have actually been achieved or are being achieved;
- Factors contributing to or impeding achievement of the outcome: This necessitates monitoring the country context and the economic, sociological, political and other developments simultaneously taking place;
- The partnership strategy: This requires the design of partnership strategies to be analyzed as well as the formation and functioning of partnerships. This helps to ensure that partners who are concerned with an outcome have a common appreciation of problems and needs, and that they share a synchronized strategy.

Offices may add additional elements where needed for management or analysis, while keeping a realistic scope in view of available capacities.

Monitoring does more than look at what projects deliver. Its scope includes assessing the progress of projects, programs, partnerships and soft assistance in relation to

outcomes as well as providing managers with information that will be used as a basis for making decisions and taking action.

Adequate budgetary resources should be allocated for monitoring. The CO may charge the project budget directly for the cost of monitoring visits related to informing the designated institution. The project budget may also cover the participation of national partners in monitoring visits, when agreed by the Resident Representative.


- Selecting the right monitoring tools

The monitoring approaches and tools described here may be applied to projects, programs, outcomes and any activity that can be monitored. Steering committees, for example, normally have been established for projects, yet they can also be established to monitor an outcome with which a number of projects are associated.

Program Managers work within a framework focused on progress towards outcomes. Within that framework, Program Managers must determine the correct mix of monitoring tools and approaches for each project, program or outcome, ensuring that the monitoring contains an appropriate balance between:

- Reporting/analysis, which entails obtaining and analyzing documentation from the project that provides information on progress;
- Validation, which entails checking or verifying whether or not the reported progress is accurate;
- Participation, which entails obtaining feedback from partners and beneficiaries on progress and proposed actions.

Table 1 lists a variety of monitoring mechanisms, divided into three categories according to their predominant characteristic. The main purpose of field visits is validation by direct observation, for example, although they may also be considered participatory if they involve feedback from beneficiaries. Different groups of people will use different tools—or use them differently. It is not realistic to expect that any one monitoring tool or mechanism will satisfy all needs. Monitoring of outcomes may require a different mix of tools than the tools traditionally used at project level. Instruments such as project visits or tripartite/bi-lateral meetings may be insufficient because the scope of the project is too narrow or the range of partners involved is too limited. Instead, more useful tools may include reviews by outcome groups, analysis and surveys.

TABLE 1. SELECTING THE RIGHT MIX OF MONITORING MECHANISMS		
REPORTING AND ANALYSIS	VALIDATION	PARTICIPATION
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Annual project report (APR) ■ Progress and/or quarterly reports ■ Work plans ■ Project/programme delivery reports and combined delivery reports ■ Substantive project documentation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Field visits ■ Spot-check visits ■ External assessments/monitoring ■ Client surveys ■ Evaluations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Outcome groups ■ Steering committees/mechanisms ■ Stakeholder meetings ■ Focus group meetings ■ Annual review
<div style="text-align: center;">  Learning takes place through all monitoring tools or mechanisms </div>		

4.2.2. The Building Blocks: Monitoring Tools and Mechanisms

A variety of formal and informal monitoring tools and mechanisms are available for use by country offices, including field visits, annual project reports, outcome groups and annual reviews. Their formats and approaches are adaptable to local needs, provided the minimum content is reflected—namely progress towards outcome, outputs and partnerships. Offices are expected to use tools and mechanisms such as the three key examples described below.

Field visits

Field visits are frequently used as a monitoring mechanism. It is common policy to conduct regular field visits. Consideration should be given to the timing of the visit, its purpose in terms of monitoring, and what to look for in order to measure progress.

What should we look at during a field visit? The emphasis is on observing the progress being made towards the attainment of results (outcome and outputs) that are contributing to the goals of the project. The Program Manager should also look at the contribution of soft interventions, the development of strategic partnerships and rates progress towards outputs and outcome. In a change from past practice, detailed implementation issues will no longer be the main focus of field visits.

Annual project report

The annual project report (APR) serves as the basis for assessing the performance of programs and projects in terms of their contributions to intended outcomes through outputs and partnership work. As a self-assessment report by project management to the health office, the APR does not require a cumbersome preparatory process. It can be readily used to spur dialogue with partners.

Timing: The reporting period of the APR is flexible because project performance assessment may take place at any time of the year. Ideally, however, the APR should be prepared every 12 months.

Purpose: The annual project report (APR) provides a self-assessment by the project management and is part of the Program Manager's review of the project's performance.

The APR should provide an accurate update on project results, identify major constraints and propose future directions. The APR provides input into the health office reporting process. It analyzes the underlying factors contributing to any lack of progress so that project management can learn from experience and improve performance.

Preparation: The APR is prepared by the project management—those responsible for the day-to-day management of the project (Chief Technical Advisor, Project Coordinator, National Director or equivalent).

Outcome groups

Another important way of monitoring is the use of coordination mechanisms that bring together partners for discussion and analysis. This is generally known as the use of “outcome groups”.

The major need for this is to employ mechanisms that involve partners and allow for periodic discussion and analysis around outcomes. For ease of reference, coordination mechanisms that monitor outcomes are referred to as “outcome groups”. Such groups focus on the monitoring of outcomes and the contribution of outputs to outcomes; they do not address general information exchange or project details. Ideally, outcome groups should use existing mechanisms such as established program steering committees, thematic groups or sectoral coordination groups. If regular mechanisms do not exist, the CO may bring key partners together at periodic meetings.

Projects should be included in outcome group discussions because they need to have a vision of the outcome to which their outputs are ultimately contributing.

Purpose: Outcome groups ensure continuous outcome assessment, which serves as a basis for the monitoring process and enhances progress towards results. They also promote partnerships. Bringing together different projects concerned with a single shared outcome may help ensure synergy and reinforce a common strategy among other projects and partners towards results.

Participation: Participants in outcome groups include Program Managers and Project Directors. Outcome groups also involve the Assistant Resident Representative or Deputy Resident Representative and government counterparts at the technical level. External partners should also participate at least once a year, but may not wish to attend all meetings.

Focus: What do outcome groups look at? The outcome group assesses the status of strategic outputs and related initiatives by partners—all of which contribute to an intended outcome. It does so by examining information from projects, national reports, donor reports and other sources. By bringing partners together, it helps define the strategic approach towards the outcome and assists in its formulation. A central task is to agree on a monitoring plan for the outcome and oversee its implementation. It also serves as the focal team for outcome evaluations. An outcome group should be a vehicle for documenting and disseminating lessons learned. When partners are involved, the outcome group may be part of the annual review, where the main consultations on the given outcome take place.

4.3. The Evaluation Process

How do Health offices prepare for and manage an evaluation? And how does an evaluation team go about conducting an evaluation? This section introduces outcome evaluation methodology and provides suggestions on improving project evaluations. It also helps users to manage an evaluation process and set standards for quality results-oriented evaluations.

4.3.1. Preparing for an evaluation

Preparing for any evaluation requires an investment of time and thought. More preparation time and reflection in advance is generally required for an outcome evaluation than for a project evaluation.

Purpose and timing

Deciding precisely why and when to conduct an outcome evaluation is a process that begins early in the programming cycle. Evaluation plans are made on the basis of a certain (and varying) number of outcomes that each health office is required to evaluate in a given health program cycle. A variety of outcome evaluations—each with different purposes, scopes and timing—will take place during that cycle. Health offices should strive to identify, at least generally, the purpose and timing of their evaluations in a comprehensive and coherent manner—and do so as early as possible. The timing of an outcome evaluation should be directly linked to its purpose. If, for example, the outcome evaluation is expected to contribute to learning and a change in the type of outputs or the partnership strategy, it should be conducted early enough to allow this change in programming.

Revisiting the outcome

One of the first steps in planning is to revisit the outcome selected for evaluation. This is done as a check to verify that the outcome is still relevant and to re-identify explicitly the key outputs, projects, programs, activities and partners' interventions that may have contributed to the outcome. This information should be readily available to the health office staff from regular monitoring reports, and from the evaluation plan prepared by each health office, which details the projects and programs that are directed towards a given outcome. Ideally, revisiting the outcome should occur at least six months in advance of evaluation itself.

Defining the scope

Typically, the scope of a project evaluation is self-defined within the project document. The scope of an outcome evaluation will be larger than that of a project evaluation in most cases. Senior health office management, the program staff, the key partners and, if possible, the evaluation team leader, should all participate in defining the scope of the outcome evaluation.

Drafting the terms of reference

At a minimum, it is expected that terms of reference for all evaluations will contain the following information:

- Introduction: A brief description of what is to be evaluated (outcome, program, project, series of interventions by several partners, etc.);
- Objectives: Why the evaluation is being undertaken and a list of the main stakeholders and partners;
- Scope: What issues, subjects, areas and timeframe the evaluation will cover;
- Products expected from the evaluation: What products the evaluation is expected to generate (e.g. findings, recommendations, lessons learned, rating on performance, an “action item” list);
- Methodology or evaluation approach: The methodology suggested to the evaluation team;
- Evaluation team: Composition and areas of expertise;

- Implementation arrangements: Who will manage the evaluation and how it is organized.

The terms of reference (TOR) should retain enough flexibility for the evaluation team to determine the best approach to collecting and analyzing data. The TOR, for example, might suggest a combined approach of questionnaires, field visits and interviews—but the evaluation team should be able to revise this approach as it sees fit. The terms of reference involves strategic choices about what to focus on, and therefore should be reviewed by key stakeholders in an evaluation and, in the case of outcome evaluation, should involve partners in the drafting process.

Budgeting

Budgeting for an evaluation depends upon the complexity of the project or outcome to be evaluated and the purpose of the exercise. These factors dictate the timeframe and the number of evaluators needed. For projects, evaluation resources are allocated from the monitoring and evaluation lines of the project budget. Similarly, outcome evaluations draw on the respective monitoring and evaluation allocations of the projects and programs that contribute to that outcome.

When budgeting for an outcome evaluation, health office should consider the following factors:

- The scope, complexity and time commitments of the evaluation: An outcome evaluation conducted early in the Country Program is apt to be less complex and entail a smaller scope and time commitment than would a “heavier” exercise conducted at the end of the Country Program. The greater the complexity and scope of an evaluation, the longer time and more detailed work will be required of the evaluation team, thus increasing evaluators’ fees. The duration of an outcome evaluation will be determined by its purpose, with earlier, shorter-term exercises costing less than later, longer-term exercises.
- The need to minimize time and expense: It is recommended that health offices provide the evaluation TORs to all short-listed candidates for the evaluation team leader position, so that the team leader may provide feedback on the methodology and timing of the mission. This can help minimize the time spent on preparation. Another way to minimize time is to hire firms rather than individuals, in cases where firms charge a flat rate for the entire evaluation rather than daily rates for additional, unexpected time. Country offices also are encouraged to take advantage of national evaluative expertise and use national experts on outcome evaluation missions, to the extent possible, which should help reduce the cost of the evaluation.
- The use of field visits and interviews: Outcome evaluations may require evaluators to speak with a range of partners, stakeholders and beneficiaries about perceptions of progress towards results or the production of outputs. Field visits and interviews may be quite brief for outcome evaluations conducted earlier in the Country Program. Later exercises require evaluators speak with a wider variety of stakeholders and partners, thereby influencing travel, and consultancy costs.
- The areas of expertise needed among the evaluators: Because a multidisciplinary approach is needed for outcome evaluations, the evaluation team will need to include at least one evaluator (national or international). In addition, one evaluator (national or international) should also have in-depth knowledge of the outcome to be evaluated. These criteria could increase the consultancy costs for the mission.

Selecting the evaluation team

Beyond the health office's Evaluation Team(ET) is the official team of experts who will conduct the evaluation. The choice of the evaluators is an important factor in the effectiveness of evaluations. Evaluators can be internal, or external. External evaluation firms or individual evaluators may be national or international, or a combination of both. All members of a team must be independent— with absolutely no connections to the design, formulation or implementation of the outcomes, programs, projects or activities in question. The team must not include government civil servants who are directly or indirectly related to the activities and their results. Failure to observe this requirement could compromise the credibility and independence of the exercise.

4.3.2. Managing and Evaluation

This brief overview of the tasks involved in managing an evaluation touches on data collection and analysis, backstopping and feedback, reporting and follow-up. Such responsibilities belong to the health office staff—usually the Program Manager, outcome group or evaluation focal team.

Collecting and analyzing data

Most of the primary data collection and analysis for an outcome evaluation is the responsibility of the health office, more specifically, the evaluation focal team (EFT) (if there is one). The EFT decides which method(s) to use in the collection and analysis of information. Both qualitative and quantitative methods are used. The methods respond to different objectives and use different instruments and methodologies yet are highly complementary. Preparing for an evaluation normally requires a combination of both types of methods.

Qualitative methods can be used to inform the questions posed by the evaluators through interviews and surveys, as well as to analyze the social, economic and political context within which development changes take place.

Quantitative methods can be used to inform the qualitative data collection strategies by, for example, applying statistical analysis to control for socio-economic conditions of different study areas.

Backstopping and feedback

The health office staff or the ET is responsible for liaising with partners, backstopping and providing technical feedback to the evaluation team. The ET or other staff should be in constant liaison with the evaluation team. These well-informed staff members push the evaluation team to justify its conclusions and back them up with evidence, and help deepen and clarify the evaluation team's discussions.

The ET is the main group with which the evaluation team interacts. It answers questions, facilitates interactions and provides information.

Reporting

The seeds for the conclusions and recommendations of the evaluation report are found in the evaluation's terms of reference (TOR). The TOR for an outcome evaluation, for example, will include the outcome to be studied and why it was selected, the scope of the mission, and the strategy for collecting and analyzing data. The outcome evaluation report also would be expected to include these elements. The evaluation team is bound by the TOR to ensure that the selected issues are adequately addressed in the report, although some flexibility will allow the team to add issues that it feels are particularly pertinent. Generally, the team leader drafts a table of contents at the earliest stage of the evaluation, the TOR and discussions with interested parties and partners.

The draft table of contents serves as a convenient framework around which to organize information as the work proceeds. The table of contents helps focus the fieldwork that is required to collect missing information, verify information and draw and discuss conclusions and recommendations.

Once the first draft of the evaluation report is submitted, the ET or the health office staff (e.g. focal point for the evaluation, project staff and/or senior management), should analyze and provide comments. After comments are incorporated, the final draft version should be circulated among partners to obtain their valuable feedback. The evaluation team leader is responsible for incorporating comments into the final version of the report, and then for submitting it to the senior management of the health office. Depending upon the complexity of the evaluation findings, the health office should consider organizing a half-day stakeholders meeting at which to make a presentation to the partners and stakeholders. This helps ensure that there is a common understanding of the evaluation findings and facilitates feedback on the report draft.

Following up

The evaluation process does not end with the submission and acceptance of the evaluation report. Rather, the findings, conclusions, recommendations and lessons learned need to be internalized and acted upon. Therefore, the final step in managing and conducting any evaluation is to follow up on the evaluation report and implementation of change. This step is closely linked to the knowledge and learning processes.

5. Important references and websites

- ❖ Evaluation criteria. <http://www.oecd.org//dac/Evaluation/htm/evalcrit.htm>
- ❖ Handbook of monitoring. www.scn.org/ip/cds/cmp/hemon.htm
- ❖ Improving evaluation practices: Best practice guidelines for evaluation and background paper, 1999, <http://www.oecd.org/puma>
- ❖ Monitoring and evaluation for results: A handbook.
stone.undp.org/undpweb/eo/evalnet/docstore3/yellowbook
[main reference of this handbook]
- ❖ Monitoring and evaluation handbook.
web.mit.edu/urbanupgrading/upgrading/issues-tools/tools/monitoring-eval.html
- ❖ Monitoring and evaluation methodologies.: The program manager's M&E toolkit, 2000, http://bbs.unfpa.org/ooe/me_methodologies.htm
- ❖ W.K. Kellogg Foundation, Evaluation handbook, 1998,
<http://www.WKKF.org/>
- ❖ UNDP. <http://intra.undp.org/eo/cedab>
- ❖ UNICEF, A guide for monitoring and evaluation,
<http://www.unicef.org/reseval/mande4r.htm>
- ❖ World bank, impact evaluation, April 2001,
<http://www.worldbank.org/poverty/impact/index.htm>
- ❖ UNDP, Selecting key results indicators,
http://stone.undp.org/undpweb/eo/evalnet/docstore1/index_final/methodology/documents/indicators.PDF
- ❖ World bank, performance monitoring indicators: A handbook for task managers, 1996, <http://www.worldbank.org/html/oed/evaluation/>
- ❖ UNDP, Evaluation capacity development in Asia, 2000,
http://intra.undp.org/eo/documents/evaluation_cap_dev_china.pdf
- ❖ World bank, Evaluating gender and development at the world bank.
<http://www.worldbank.org/evaluation/lesson/>
- ❖ WHO. www.who.org/pub/